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SUBJECT: GETTING REAL ON KOSOVO

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: As part of the Embassy's ongoing effort to reach out to Serbs and explain our support for Kosovo's supervised independence, the Ambassador and his French counterpart co-hosted a lunch for Serbian journalists and other opinion makers for a frank, off-the-record, discussion on Kosovo. The participants took the opportunity to ask direct questions about protections for Kosovo Serbs and the reasons for USG and French support of the Ahtisaari plan. The Ambassadors sent a clear message that the Ahtisaari plan is the best available solution and emphasized the plan's protections for Kosovo Serbs. List of attendees in paragraph 7. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On April 11, the Ambassador and the French Ambassador co-hosted a luncheon at the French Embassy for Serbian journalists and other influential opinion makers. The purpose of the event was for a subset of the Contact Group to show a united stand in support of the Ahtisaari proposal and to give the participants the opportunity to ask direct questions about Kosovo in an off-the-record setting. The journalists took advantage of the access by asking about partition, whether Kosovo would be a precedent, and the details of protections for Kosovo Serbs under the proposal.

¶3. (SBU) Both the Ambassador and his French counterpart responded that partition was categorically "off the table," not least, because Serbia had never even proposed it, and because it would not resolve Kosovo differences, but exacerbate them. The Ambassador presented the case for Kosovo not being a precedent, noting that the international community's involvement (and reasons for involvement) in Kosovo were unique. Both Ambassadors also laid out the "very strong" protections for the Kosovo Serb community and noted the continuation of real supervision under the new ICO. Many journalists seemed not know of or appreciate the extent of the provisions for Kosovo Serbs.

¶4. (SBU) Kosovo Serb leader Oliver Ivanovic made his own case against partition, noting that it would simply drive Serbs from the enclaves and make the north of Kosovo even more targeted by Albanian extremists. He also refuted the journalist from right of center daily Politika's concern about a Kosovo army, noting that 2,500 soldiers is "symbolic" and that he worries more about a handful of extremists who might provoke violence.

¶5. (SBU) Both Ambassadors also emphasized that the IC's involvement was not something the U.S. or France sought or even welcomed. The facts were that Serbia and Serb and Albanian Kosovars had been unable to find a solution to the Kosovo conflict. The IC now had a plan. No one else did.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: The guests took full advantage of the access afforded them in this off-the-record event. These ongoing efforts to be realistic with different elements of Serbian society and address their concerns head-on are useful, even if no consensus is ever achieved. In an atmosphere of denial and lack of candor by Serbia's leadership, exposing people to albeit unwanted truth

remains clearly important. END COMMENT.

17. (U) Attendees:

- Ambassador Polt
- French Ambassador Hugues PERNET
- Jacqueline BASSA-MAZZONI, DCM, French Embassy
- Raphael POLI, Intern, French Embassy
- Oliver IVANOVIC, Serbian List for Kosovo-Metohija
- Ivan VEJVODA, Balkan Trust for Democracy
- Miljenko DERETA, Director, Civic Initiatives
- Vladimir RADOMIROVIC, POLITIKA
- Ivana CVETKOVIC, BLIC
- Milica MANCIC, FOX
- Milovan JAUKOVIC, DANAS
- Dragana ALEKSIC, TANJUG
- Ksenija PRODANOVIC, BETA
- Dusan STOJANOVIC, Associated Press
- Andre BIRUKOFF, Director, AFP

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